1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
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Chapter Four

BIRTH, INFANCY AND EARLY TRAINING

PREGNANCY and giving birth are perhaps the most important events in a married woman's life, and therefore the characteristics and symptoms of pregnancy are easily recognized in the female circles in the village. Unless otherwise stated most of the information given in this chapter has been supplied by a female relative of the writer. The informant divided the period of pregnancy into three main stages:

The first is the month of secrecy (al shahr al sirry) when, at the stopping of menstruation, the woman realizes that she is going to conceive. The news should be kept a secret from all except the closest family circle. If any neighbours or visitors should enquire about it, it should be positively denied. This atmosphere of secrecy should be kept up as long as possible for fear of the evil eye. It is believed that at this early stage the embryo is more susceptible to the influences of the evil eye than at any other stage.

In the second month, the woman may declare, still with reluctance, that she is heavy, or carrying (thagila or hamil). During this month it is said she is prone to feel dizzy (daikha), and is much inclined to stretch and sleep readily. It is believed that during this period also God starts shaping the prospective baby; consequently a pregnant woman should not be awakened by anybody if she is asleep, lest such disturbance hamper or interfere with the process of creation. Children's congenital defects or abnormalities, e.g. six fingers, split lip, bulging forehead, are attributed to the fact that the mother's sleep was disturbed during this period.

The third important stage is that of craving (waham) which is experienced by the woman during the third and fourth months. During this stage the pregnant woman is allowed free and wider choice in her food. She is demanding articles of food which she 'craves for' continually, and they are usually items that are rare or at least not within everyday access, e.g. melons, fruit, savouries and the like. Eating is supposed to stand her in good stead during the ordeal of pregnancy and birth.

The husband must do his best to provide his wife with what she craves for, otherwise he would be socially disparaged by his wife's family. It is a common theme in village gossip to refer to a woman who is always strain-

[p. 86 is blank]

BIRTH, INFANCY AND EARLY TRAINING

858 pride in the number of my followers in comparison with those of other
848 nations". If sons and daughters behave uprightly they will act as a means
[783] of redeeming the parents' sin. Any good action by the child, e.g. giving alms, helping the weak, digging a well, would also benefit the parents. Parents who have left unworthy children have left "dust" behind.'

858 My informant went on to say: 'Children are the glory of this world, as
779 the Koran says "Money and children are the joy of this life". Another statement of the Koran says: "God give us a good thing in this world and a good thing in the next world". The Koran interpreters consider that, in this context, "the good thing of this world" implies children. Children are also referred to as sowing seeds, as it is through these seeds that the corn reproduces itself.'

593 As for the wife, she attains her proper status only as a mother, and a
554 childless woman is in an insecure position, as her husband is socially
[595] justified in remarrying, to have children. For a newly-married couple to have a child is a step towards partaking of some individuality in the larger family circle. The wife is referred to as 'mother of the children' and whenever a man is asked about his wife, she is frequently referred to also as the 'mother of the first-born boy' and the same applies also to the father, and this reference is more common in public gatherings.

848 My informant, Mahmoud, told me that there were ten childless women in the village and that they were therefore known by everybody. Out of these ten, two were living with husbands who had taken a second wife. He continued, 'A childless woman is usually like a she-camel who does not conceive, puts on more and more flesh, and gets younger every day—but not fruitful, as she can never "lengthen" her husband's neck amongst the menfolk. She is a sore eye to her family. The proper woman is the one who
[156] is an "envelope for conception".' It is not strange, then, that a fat woman
[826] is a desirable ideal, as she has more room to bear the child, lactates abundantly and gives more warmth to her children.

858 It is appropriate here to discuss the differential value of boys and girls
593 in Silwa. The importance of the boys' work in the fields as a major con-
562 tribution to the family's means of subsistence was discussed earlier. Moreover, the boys are considered to be the best capital investment for ageing
736 parents. They are expected to form the basis for social and economic
737 security, not only for their parents, but also for any widowed sisters. This duty to support their parents or those female relatives who have no other man to support them is legally enforced by the religious courts. This question gives rise to endless disputes; one hears of parents suing their children for support according to their means, or at least threatening to sue them. No such obligations devolve on the daughters, as they are wives of their husbands, and no claim can be made against them.

554 Boys are also an added qualification for social prestige. A man with
562 more sons backing him up can always speak with more authority and ranks high in the community's esteem even if he owns less land. Fathers who have

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not only during the first forty days but which is also sustained till the arrival of the next baby. According to the family structure in the village, there are invariably at least two grown-up women attending to the rearing of the child, or sharing in the child's care, e.g. maternal grandmother, paternal grandmother, sisters, paternal or maternal aunts, or brothers' wives. As the newly born baby, or even any child, has no special cradle, cot, or bed, it always sleeps beside the mother or sits on her lap. After the forty days it may be picked up by relatives.

During the third and fourth month, the child is usually held horizontally with the mother's hands underneath its legs and head. During the fourth month it is held vertically, supported under the arms, and can be carried against the mother's breast, being supported with her hands under the buttocks. During the fifth month, he is normally held astride the mother's hip.

Nursing is one of the first basic needs of the child which in this community conforms to no schedule. It is guided only by two principles. The first is that the child is given the breast whenever it cries. The second is that it is suckled when the breast becomes 'compassionate', in other words when the mother's breast becomes full. It is said that when there is 'compassion' in the breast the child is hungry, and therefore the mother must offer it to her baby. The reciprocity between the baby's need and the breast is recognized to be one of the determining factors in suckling. It is true that in Silwa, as in Artas, the mother's breast is the symbol of compassion.[1] Nothing is more binding in the mother-child relationship than the memories of 'stomach enveloping' and 'breast-feeding' which are symbols invoked by mothers to remind their sons or daughters to be obedient, or to come to their help in old age. 'I enveloped you for nine months and have fed you with my breast' is supposed to be one of the most effective and compelling entreaties. In this connection, Ali related the story of the Caliph Harun al Rashid and Gafar al Barmaki, his vizier, whom the former decided to kill, and imprison or disperse the rest of his family, after he feared that they were plotting to remove him from the Caliphate. Harun carried out his decisions in spite of the entreating of Gafar's mother, who had breast-fed the Caliph and who had implored him by the milk she gave him, and the locks of his hair she had cut off and kept with her. 'This is', remarked Ali, 'an example of tyranny that overrides one's duties towards his breast-feeder who is like a mother.'

It is because women can provide their babies with milk that they are considered to be endowed with compassion. This is one of the tangible arguments for the value of having girls, who would be a source of compassion not only for their children, but also for their parents.

The time and frequency of suckling varies from day to day and from child to child. A child who often cries is regarded as a weakling and hence its need for more suckling. A mother of a four-month-old child, who was

[1] H. Granqvist, *Birth and Childhood among the Arabs*, p. 107.

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occasion, even if they live with the father in the same household. Dispute between brothers or sisters is usually an irrelevant factor in the exchange of mutual contributions which are morally compulsory on such occasions. The ideal of the family solidarity must be expressed, at least formally at public ceremonies. The sociological significance of the ceremony cannot be exaggerated, as it must take place even in the case of children whose foreskin is congenitally contracted or damaged by disease. Although such children are believed to be circumcised by the angels, the ceremony is still held, even without any operation on the child.

Traditionally, one of the main justifications for holding the ceremony is the religious significance attached to it throughout the whole Moslem world. To be a Moslem, it is believed, is to be circumcised as distinguished from the non-Moslems, who for the most part are not circumcised. However, there is no text in the Koran that enjoins circumcision upon the Moslem, and it is only mentioned in the prophetic tradition. It is maintained that circumcision was the practice not only of the Prophet Mohammed, but all previous prophets, such as Abraham, Noah, Hud, Saleh, Joseph, Moses, and Solomon. In the prophetic sayings there is no fixed time for the performance of circumcision, as amongst the Jews; it is, however, preferable to have it done before the boy attains maturity. It is reported that the Prophet said, 'Abraham, the friend of the Merciful, was the first man who entertained guests, the first man who underwent circumcision, the first man who shortened his moustache, and the first man who saw grey hairs. He asked, on seeing the grey hairs: "O Lord, what is this?" The Almighty and Glorious Lord said: "Dignity, O Abraham." He said: "O Lord, increase dignity in me."' Another prophetic tradition says, 'Circumcision is my way for men, but is merely ennobling for women'. It is also reported that the Prophet told a woman who was just converted into Islam and was thinking of being circumcised, 'Don't inflict trouble on yourself, because that is painful to a wife, but pleasing to a husband'.[1]

The chain of authorities for most of the Prophet's dicta about circumcision is more often than not weak, and one is justified in regarding them as open to question. The four Schools of Moslem Law differ as to the obligatory nature of circumcision.[2] The practice, however, was widespread, though not universal, in pagan Arabia, and to be uncircumcised —'aghral' or 'aghlaf'—was thought disgraceful. Modern educated Moslems might justify circumcision on hygienic grounds, but the writer did not get any such explicit or implicit explanation from the villagers. For the latter, it literally means religious purification, which makes the person

[1] *Mishkat-al-Masabih*, English translation by al-Hag Maulana-Fazlul Karim, Vol. I, pp. 737–8.

[2] *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Article, 'Circumcision (Muhammadan)', by D. S. Margoliouth. In the same source under 'Circumcision (Ancient Egypt)', it is mentioned that this ritual was practised in Ancient Egypt, although there is no decisive evidence with regard to either its generality or the nature of its practice.

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he did not play games at all. Boys and girls become 'muaddab' if they do not mix in play after the age of eleven or twelve. After the age of twelve, a girl would be considered 'muaddab' if she drops her glance and keeps clear of male gatherings, and when she becomes older, covers part of her face if she is passing by a group of men. A boy is 'muaddab' if he recognizes that he should sit in the back row on going to the mosque. As Mahmoud put it, a disciplined boy or girl is one who knows when and where to sit and stand, where and when to put his or her feet and thus become 'Ibn halal' (literally 'heir to the permissible'). Ali, on the other hand, expressed the importance of 'giving adab' to children by saying that it is believed that one of the signs of the end of this world will be when discipline and modesty (adab wa haya) disappear from the acts and deeds of the people.

The keynote to the educational process is the eagerness of the adults to create a docile attitude in their children and thus make them acquire filial piety.[1] The children readily accept the authority of their seniors, whether in work or play, and they endeavour to avoid their anger. This ready acceptance of the authority of those older than the child is epitomized in the axiom: 'He who is one day older than you, is in fact wiser by one year', which is a common saying often repeated by adolescent boys and girls. A child of twelve told me that it was always better to avoid the outbursts of one's elders: one of their curses might receive a hearing from God.

The ideal norm of 'adab' is a value which also has its religious sanction, as a pious son (ibn salih) is synonymous with 'muaddab'. Such a value does not only include the child's economic services and his observance of the expected social behaviour, but also implies a pattern of reciprocity between child and family. A father who neglects the care of his 'polite' children may be frequently exposed to illness, failure of crop, or death of cattle. Moreover, a family that infringes on the moral and religious code may consequently have sickly children. This connection between the moral values and the welfare of the family could be illustrated by the children's swearing by their parents' life and honour.[2] One also hears from the villagers that a loss of a son, or a camel, or sudden illness, is caused by the dealing of the inflicted person in usury, his swearing untruthfully by the name of Allah or his children, his giving false evidence in court, or spreading malicious gossip. It is clear that the welfare of the family members, children as well as adults, is contingent on some basic reciprocal relations fused with moral and religious sanctions.[3]

Besides learning from their parents and elders, children also learn

[1] M. Fortes maintains that filial piety, in patrilineal societies, is a value counteracting the suppressed antagonism between father and son, and mother and daughter. *The Web of Kinship among the Tallensi*, p. 347.

[2] A father may swear 'by the neck' of his son where life is supposed to be located.

[3] See Chapter III for religious justification of offspring.

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ADOLESCENCE, SEX AND MARRIAGE

With this increasing share of responsibility, boys enjoy a certain amount of freedom as compared with their period of childhood. They are not exposed to the physical punishment which is frequently administered during childhood, except, of course, for grave offences such as stealing or neglect of their work. They are also entitled to move about freely and to mix with their age-mates without having to account for their absence at night to their parents. They can sleep outside the house in the open air in summer, or in the guest house in winter, or go to enjoy themselves at a wedding or any other ceremony.

Yet, while youths enjoy more freedom of movement concomitant with their assumed responsibilities, girls find their freedom more restricted and become more confined to the house and the neighbourhood. These restrictions are partly because their work is more concentrated in the house, and partly 'because their breasts have grown', a sign of embarrassment and shame which the girls should not be encouraged to display.

Both boys and girls, however, are expected to give up their childish play and games. One can observe groups of adolescents at night sitting at a corner of the street or in an open space, talking or telling stories or riddles, while the group of younger boys are noisily at their games. If girls still make dolls at this stage, they are not those made of maize straw for play, but those to decorate their future houses, and are made of cloth.

Although the boys' freedom is in some ways less restricted than that of the girls, it does not mean that it is considerably increased. Both still have to maintain their social space and to observe the social norms of dominance-submission which govern the pattern of relationship between old and young; both have to adhere to rules governing sex behaviour and sex dichotomy as will be shown later. On the whole the arc of growing up seems to be similar to that in Japan, represented as a curve with maximum freedom and indulgence allowed to babies and to the very old. Social disciplines are imposed after infancy, reaching the lowest point in the curve of freedom just before marriage, whereupon it gradually ascends. Marriage gives the individual a certain amount of freedom which gradually increases by having children, and later on by possessing property after the death of the father. On the other hand, old age, like infancy, is unhampered by some restrictions connected with etiquette, sexual shame, breaking wind, or covering the face—in the case of women. Old women, for instance, can go out wearing one black garment similar to children, and unlike adolescent girls, who usually wear two pieces. Old men are allowed to indulge in singing, which is different from that of the adolescents and which is called 'nameem' or 'wawat'. Children are allowed to amuse themselves by mimicking or imitating old people and earn admiration from their parents or other boys for such imitation.[1]

[1] Talking about the 'arc of life' in Japan, Ruth Benedict contrasts it with the 'American arc of life'. In the latter case, to secure the individual's energetic participation in life, the Americans rely on increasing his freedom of choice during adolescence, while the

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again appear, and the mourning kerchief is replaced by one of brighter hue. Should a woman do this before her second husband is secured the whole village knows that she is anxious to marry again. 765 589 302

Women, especially when the hair begins to turn grey, often dye it with *henna*, which stains it a bright red. This may be done by a woman who, wishing to obtain another husband, endeavours to obliterate the signs of advancing years. One day when visiting a village where I have often stayed for many weeks at a time I saw an old crone performing her toilet on the roof of her house. She was combing out her very scanty locks, which were dyed a bright red. Unfortunately, she had not been altogether successful with her hair-tinting, for considerable patches of white hair were still plainly visible. I asked a woman friend of mine, in whose house I was sitting, if the old woman wanted to marry again. She laughed, and said that she believed that this was so! I never heard that she met with any sort of success in that direction! 302 587

The men either have their hair cut quite short, or else they have the head shaved altogether. Some of them, however, leave one lock of hair at the back of the head, allowing it to grow quite long, even though the rest of the head may be closely shaved. One man told me that he wore this lock of hair so that when he died the men who washed him might not have to touch his head, but could hold it by this lock. I gathered that he thought that it would defile him if they caught hold of his head, but I am not sure about this point. My brother, Dr A. M. Blackman, tells me that a man told him that the object of the lock was to prevent those who washed a corpse from raising the head by putting a hand into the mouth and so possibly defiling the dead. 302 764

The men usually shave all the hair off the face, except the moustache. Old men, however, frequently allow the beard to grow, as it is looked upon as a mark of honour at that time of life. Most of the body hair of both sexes is shaved off, to ensure ceremonial purity. 302 886

A child often has the hair shaved off just above the forehead. In some parts of Egypt this is considered to be a good thing for the eyes, as it is believed that the hair growing on that part of the head is injurious to the eyesight when the child is very young. The shaven portion is often covered with *henna*. Another special 302 [806]

respiration he spits out the water from his mouth forcibly and comes down without mishap. In most cases, however, giddiness overcomes the person, and he falls in a faint and does not get up for some time. [p. 40.]

The true treatment. Since this ailment is nought but bloodlessness, which prolongs many a long illness, its cure is comprised in taking healthy precautions such as (after the removal of the cause) the taking of iron compounds.

XXIII

THE "SEVERED" HEART

WHEN any sick person complains of weakness in his strength and withering in his body after severe fevers or very depressing illnesses the "old wives" of the village diagnose his illness as "the severing of the heart." (اتقطع القلب).

The true explanation. To this they attribute causes which are weaker than a spider's web, such as that the patient had in the time of his health carried something heavy for example, and they assert that the cords of the heart have been cut by this means. I know that Farag Abū Maḥmūd of the village of Munāḥela in the Province of Buḥaira (he is the eczema doctor, see Part I, p. 77) cauterizes those afflicted by this ailment, burning deeply all along the vertebral canal. Often he increases his kindness and beneficence towards the patient by burning him in the navel two or three times.

XXIV

THE "SPLITTING" OF THE EYE

EVERY day we see hundreds of *fellāḥīn* complaining of intermittent ophthalmia, especially at the beginning of the summer

8:Schaefer A-5 (1900-1901) 1904
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69.

Why Dost Thou Beat me, Mother?

Bil-amān, ya-lummē,
wa-la tuḍrub aiye!
Lē tuḍrubni
wana smi Lēle?
Rummān ṣudri ṭāb
u-ṭarah eg-genēne.
Ana ma'āk 'and el-'āḍi
fi-hāza-l-lēle.

Do not punish me, mother,
And do not beat me!
Why dost thou beat me
When my name is Lēle ("night")?
The pomegranates of my breast are ripe,
And the garden beareth fruit.
I shall go with thee to the judge
This very evening.

4. The word lēle, "night", and Lēle, the name of a girl, have nothing to do with one another. They were originally two different words, which, in the modern language, have the same sound and for that reason are made use of here for a pun.

The girl means: "Is it not perfectly natural, that I should think of things which my very name suggests?"

7. He will concede that I am right! The 'āḍi (QĀdi) or ecclesiastical judge, is called upon to decide especially in affairs of marriage.

8:Schaefer A-5 (1900-1901) 1904
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92.

The Sweetheart as a Physician for Love-Sickness.

Magrūḥ u-kulli gurahatî,
ḥaiye hatū-li ṭabībi!
Magrūḥ bi-sinn il-lawāḥiz,
ya rabb, ḥallī-li ḥabībi.

I am wounded, full of wounds,
Up! Bring me my physician!
I have been wounded by a lance of eyes;
O Lord, grant me my beloved!

3. Literally: by the point or sharpness of the glances. The beaming eyes of the beauty pierce like arrows or lances (Vollers).

8:Schaefer A-5 (1900-1901) 1904
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96.

An Elixir.

"If thou hadst thy happiness to buy at the cost of people's respect, the treasures revealed would carry thee through it all."

Haiya, yabnē 'ammi,
wiš-balāk bil-ṛarām?
Lō šuft nchūdi,
rummān 'ala 'ādi,
la-tmūt yahūdi
wa-la 'alēkšē malām.
Lō šuft el-ḥala'
fuidni bara',
la-tšil bil-ṛala'
wa-la 'alēkšē malām.

Up, cousin!
Why art thou so cast down with grief?
If thou couldst see my breasts,
Like pomegranates on my body,
Thou mightest die like a Jew,
Without being open to blame!

×539
883

5 *Wet-tōr 'al: Dauwarāni,*
amla li-sād el-'iyāni.
Win gat el-'agāz, baṭṭalāni,
taḥram 'alēye-d-doāra.

"O sāqye with the huge wheel
Have the girls come down here to thee?"
[824] "One with a head-kerchief has come down to me,
[826] Whose heel is like a cucumber."
5 And the ox said: "Drive me around,
That I may fill for the 'black-eyed'.
If, however, the old one comes, then let me halt,
For then the turning is forbidden me."

4. The comparison of the sweetheart's heels with the tenderness of a cucumber, is a delightfully characteristic notion of the Egyptian peasant. Maḥmūd understood ka'b as "heel", but I should not fail to mention the opinion of Arabists, that a very similarly sounding word (ku'b), meaning "breast", is to be read here.

5. Namely: Fill the trench for the black-eyed girls, who come to draw water.

2. In spinning, the thread is often moistened with the lip. 539x

3. To stand at the hearth in a peasant-hut, where the only outlet for the smoke is the door — there is rarely a window — certainly does not promote the beauty of the eyes. [286] [354]

5. It never struck me heretofore, that blond or red hair was considered by the peasant to be especially beautiful; for instead of yellow, someone else said: laḥmar = "red". [826]

6. The body is represented as a plate, on which lie the breasts, the "pomegranates" (Maḥmûd). [826]

Wild Nights.

539x
832

111.

Yasmar, ya lâbis 'agâtak,
*Ya mišša*ḥ*la' min dân a*ḥ*wâtak,*
nuṣṣ el-lêl nisma' ḥarakâtak,
šêi ginân wil-lêl ma banâm!

O brown one with the ivory bracelets,
Who art more graceful than all thy sisters,
Half the night we will listen to thy prattle,
A mad affair, and at night I will not sleep!

2. lišaḥla' refers to the coquettish movements in dancing and walking, which, according to our feeling, are not always refined. Compare 112, 1. The Arabic expressions for "graceful" and "prattle", here used, are not so innocent. [535]

9: Klunzinger D-5 (1863-1875) 1878
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special dainty on this day. Saturday is named "the Sabbath of the light," from the celebrated sacred fire, which on this day bursts forth in the Greek Church of the Sepulchre at Jerusalem, and on this account the Christian brethren there annually get up a spectacle, which often terminates in deadly blows and renders the intervention of the Turkish, and consequently Mohammedan soldiery necessary. On this day the Mohammedan faithful strengthen their eyes with eye-powders; everybody has a vein opened, or gets himself cupped, a custom which prevails in many places in the West also, and in Egypt, Mohammedan as it is, coloured Easter eggs are also eaten. People take *kishk*, that is, a decoction of wheat with sourmilk, boil it with eggs, and stick it with the coloured shells of the eggs above the doors to adorn the entrance for all time coming and ward off spirits. On Easter Sunday the "great feast of the Christians" (*id en-nusâra*) these hold a grand reception, with sherbet and holiday gifts, the Mohammedans in a friendly and neighbourly way call upon the Christians as the latter did upon them during Bairam. The Easter Monday of the Copts, whose festivals are settled by the Greek calendar, is the universal spring festival for the adherents of both religions. The night before onions, beans, and a bouquet of roses are laid under the bed-cushions and slept upon. On Easter Monday the onions are crushed and stuck with some water on the door; the beans are stuck on the bar, and the roses are used as a nosegay. At the first streak of daylight everybody moves abroad, this being the day of *shimm en-nesîm*, that is, "air-smelling," or more poetically "sipping the zephyr." People go to the gardens or other attractive spots, and pass, if possible, the whole day there. At the most-frequented places sellers of coffe, sherbet, buza, and cooked meats establish themselves. A company of friends may take an Easter lamb with them, kill it at the rendezvous they have selected, and prepare *tanur*, that is, they cut up the meat in several pieces and bake it in an improvised earth-oven; or they make *shawirma*, that is, the whole lamb with the skin and hair on is placed on a spit and roasted at the fire. The day is spent